

61 Mech Monthly

61 Mech Veterans Association

61 Meg Maandeliks

61 Meg Veterane Vereniging



Junie 2024



61 RIDERS TO ANGOLA

A Reflection on Change

In Hierdie Uitgawe

Boodskap van die Beskermheer

Van Die Voorsitter Se Lessenaar

What Happened in June?

The first 61 Rider tour to Angola

Verjaardag Wense

In Memorium

Die Besondere Verkyker

A Reflection on Change



Boodskap van die Beskermheer

2018 - 2024

Met die stigting van die 61 Mech Veterane Vereniging in 2008 is daar in die Grondwet ingeskryf dat daar vanuit (verkieslik) die oud-Bevelvoerders van die 61 Mech Bataljon Groep 'n Beskermheer aangestel moet word.

Die take van die Beskermheer is onder andere om toe te sien dat die etos en grondwet deur die lede gehandhaaf word en dat hy ook as adviseur vir die Uitvoerende komitee sal dien vir strategiese beplanning en behulpsaam wees met die uitvoering daarvan.

Dit was vir my 'n groot eer toe ek in 2018 gevra is om die 3de Beskermheer van die Vereniging te word. Sedertdien het ons Vereniging en ons land deur geweldige moeilike tye gegaan. Die Covid-19 pandemie het wêreldwyd alles tot stilstand gebring. Dit het geweldige druk op elke individu geplaas om metodes te kry om te kon oorleef en om weer na die beëindiging van die inperking, die wiel weer aan die rol te kry. In dié tyd het ons as Vereniging egter die geleentheid gebruik om verskeie projekte van stapel te stuur om 'n Makkerhulpfonds tot stand te bring wat ons in staat gestel het om 10-talle oud 61-manne van kos op hulle tafels te voorsien.

Ek wil my opregte dank uitspreek teenoor ons Nasionale Voorsitter Johan Booysen en elke lid van die Uitvoerende komitee (Jaap Steyn, Kevin West, Robert Torrani en Manus Myburgh) wat onder Johan se bekwame leiding 6 jaar se harde werk ingesit het om die bal in die lug te hou. Dit was 'n voorreg om saam met julle te kon dien.

Ons betree nou 'n nuwe era in ons geskiedenis waar ons moet aanpas in 'n nuwe wêreld. In ons Vereniging word die aflos stokkie ook aangegee na nuwe lede van die Uitvoerende komitee wat moet help om ons op koers te hou. Dit is ook tyd dat ek die posisie van Beskermheer moet oorplaas op die juk van ons 5de Bevelvoerder van die Bataljon Groep, Brig Genl (Aft) Kobus Smit, SM, MMM. Hy neem op 17 Augustus 2024 tydens die Jaarlikse Gedenkdien en Parade by die Ditsong Museum vir Militêre Geskiedenis by my oor. Ek is oortuig daarvan dat Genl Smit 'n nuwe dimensie aan die rol van die Beskermheer sal bring.

Aan die nuwe Beskermheer, die nuwe lede van die Uitvoerende Komitee en al die lede van ons Vereniging wil ek alles van die beste toewens. Mag julle elkeen saam bou aan 'n trotse nalatenskap wat die naam van die 61 Mech Bataljon Groep op almal se lippe sal hou - **Mobilitate Vincere!**

Groete

Kol (Aft) Gert van Zyl, SM, MMM



VAN DIE VOORSITTER SE LESSENAAR

Manus Myburgh

Terugvoer oor die bestuur van die vereniging

Die vereniging is 'n erkende militêre veteranevereniging, geaffilieer met die RMVO, en is geregistreer as 'n maatskappy sonder winsoogmerk. Dit beteken dat die geld wat die vereniging in-vorder, slegs aangewend mag word vir die doel waarvoor die maatskappy gestig is.

Die bestuur van die vereniging bestaan uit die volgende:

1. Die stemgeregtigde vol lede van die organisasie wat as bona fide militêre veterane deel was van Veggroep Juliet en 61 Meg Bataljon.
2. Die 6 direkteure van die maatskappy, wat saamgestel word uit die voormalige bevelvoerders, RSM's van die eenheid, geskikte ander persone en insluitend die dienende beskermheer.
3. Die Exco wat verkies word deur die lede by die Algemene Jaarvergadering, of tydens die loop van die jaar gekoopteer word op die Exco met die doel om beleid te formuleer, interpreteer en templementeer, asook om strategiese leiding te gee.
4. Die Manco (Bestuurskomitee) wat uit die Exco aangewys word vir die daaglikse bestuur van die vereniging se sake.

Kommunikasie tussen die bestuur en die lede

Die bestuur van die vereniging wil graag die wedersydse kommunikasie met die stemgeregtigde lede verbeter. Vir die doel is 'n aparte Facebookgroep geskep vir vol lede van die vereniging, waarby alle lede wat as bona fide militêre veterane deel was van Veggroep Juliet en 61 Meg Bataljon, en wie se ledegeld op datum betaal is, mag aansluit. Daar is 'n paar vrae wat beantwoord moet word voor toelating tot die groep, om seker te maak die groep bly eksklusief vir stemgeregtigde lede van die vereniging.

Die plan is om op hierdie groep met die stemgeregtigde lede te kommunikeer oor die nominasie en verkiesing van Exco lede by die komende Algemene Jaarvergadering en verder vorentoe, die grondwet en SWP's beskikbaar te hê vir maklike verwysing, bywoning van die Algemene Jaarvergadering per Zoom moontlik te maak en om vrae en kwessies oor die vereniging se huishoudelike sake op hierdie geslote groep aan te spreek.



CURRENT STATUS OF THE EXCO AND THE WAY FORWARD UNTIL THE AGM IN AUGUST 2025

1. The Executive Committee of the 61 Mech Veterans Association NPC consists of the following members:

- Patron – Col (Ret) Gert van Zyl (Retiring 17 August 2024)
- Patron Elect – Brig Genl (Ret) Kobus Smit (From 17 August 2024)
- Chairperson – Manus Myburgh
- National Skouerskuur Coordinator – Jannie Nieuwoudt
- Co-opted member and to be officially confirmed at the 2024 AGM
- Finances and membership administration – Andrew Whitaker
- Co-opted member and to be officially confirmed at the 2024 AGM
- Memorial Services and Administration (Secretary) – Manus Myburgh/Wayne Riddle
- 61 Mech Museum – Robert Torrani
- Representatives for the 4 eras in which the 61 Mech veterans served:
 - Battle Group Juliet – Vacant
 - Omuthiya - Vacant
 - Rooikop (Walvisbaai) - Vacant
 - Lohathla – Vacant
- Projects – Jaap Steyn
- Memorabilia & 61 MVA Clothing - Vacant
- Communication – Gert Minnaar
- Co-opted member and to be officially confirmed at the 2024 AGM
- All former commanders and RSM's of Battle Group Juliet and 61 Mech Battalion

2. The Manco of the 61 Mech Veterans Association NPC consists of the following members:

- Patron – Col (Ret) Gert van Zyl (until 17 August 2024))
- Patron Elect Brig Genl (Ret) Kobus Smit (From 17 August 2024)
- Chairperson – Manus Myburgh
- National Skouerskuur Coordinator – Jannie Nieuwoudt
- Finances and membership administration – Andrew Whitaker
- Administration (Secretary)/Museum – Robert Torrani
- Projects – Jaap Steyn
- Communication – Gert Minnaar

3. The abovementioned Exco and Manco members will serve in overlapping terms. The member elected in August 2023 will serve their two-year term until August 2025 and the new members will serve until August 2026.

4. The early resignations of Johan Booysen and Kevin West as members of the Exco were accepted, and they are thanked for their valuable contribution and service to the 61 Mech Veterans Association over the last 6 years.

IMPORTANT

61 Mech Veterans and Friends

The EXCO would like to keep you updated on our activities

Enable us to be able to do this

**SEND THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO:
MEMBERSHIP@61MECH.ORG.ZA**

Name

Contact number

Residential town

Dates served in 61 Meg

Email address

BELANGRIK

61 Meg Veterane en Vriende

Die EXCO wil u graag opgedateer hou oor ons aktiwiteite

Stel ons in staat om dit te kan doen

**STUUR DIE VOLGENDE INLIGTING AAN:
MEMBERSHIP@61MECH.ORG.ZA**

Naam

Kontaknommer

Dorp woonagtig

Datums in 61 Meg gedien

E-Pos adres

From the Chairman's Desk

Manus Myburgh

Feedback on the management of the association

The association is a recognised military veteran organisation, affiliated to the CMVO, and registered as a Non Profit Company. This means that all monies received by the company may only be utilised to pursue the purpose for which the company was incorporated.

The management of the association consists of the following:

1. The full members of the association with voting rights, who are bona fide military veterans, who served with Battle Group Juliet and 61 Mech Battalion.
2. The 6 directors of the company, composed of former commanders, RSM's of the unit and other suitable persons, inclusive of the serving patron.
3. The Exco, which is elected by the members at the Annual General Meeting, or whose members are coopted during the course of the year, with its purpose to formulate, interpret and implement policy, and also to provide strategic guidance.
4. The Manco (Management committee) appointed from the Exco, to run the day to day matters of the association.

Communication between the management and members

The management wants to improve the mutual communication with the members with voting rights. A separate Facebook group was created for this purpose for the full members of the association, which group may be joined by all members who are bona fide military veterans who served with Battle Group Juliet and 61 Mech Battalion, and whose membership fees are paid up to date. There are a few questions which must be answered before one gets admitted to this group, to ensure that the group remains exclusive for members of the association with voting rights.

The intention is to communicate with the full members with voting rights on this group about the nomination and election of Exco members at the pending Annual General Meeting, have the constitution and SOP's available for perusal, allowing for attendance of the Annual General Meeting by Zoom and to address questions and issues regarding internal matters of the association in this closed group.

DON'T FORGET !!!

61 Mech

***Veterane Vereniging /
Veterans Association***

***Jaarlikse Gedenkdienst –
Annual Memorial Service***

17 Augustus / August 2024



What Happened in June?

**SKOUERSKUUR PORT ELIZABETH
AT ALDO SCRIBANTE RACETRACK - 1 JUNE**



61 Mech in Parliament

In light of the forming of a new parliament I think it's appropriate to raise a point of order. These elections bring to an end Mike Bond's term as a member of Parliament. He was seen proudly contributing from the benches, wearing his 61 veterans regalia, on many occasions.

He did us proud. Congratulations Mike on a successful term of office and enjoy your retirement from Parliament.

Andrew Whitaker



D DAY - 6 JUNE

Damien Blythe

Great D Day service. Such loss in the initial assaults and then to the liberation of Europe and the end of the war. To those that never came home! RIP, never forgotten.



CLUB OMUTHIYA SKOUWERSKUUR 7 JUNE

The monthly get together at club Omuthiya was held on Friday 7 June. It was also the start of the 44th anniversary reunion of Operation Sceptic (Smokeshell). Reg Walkerley welcomed all present. It was noted that Barrie's Barnard was in ICU and he was wished a speedy recovery. Andrew Whitaker thanked Reg and Club Omuthiya for once again hosting the Smokeshell veterans. He announced that 4 Geel messies were to be presented in a joint presentation by retired Lt Colonel Cassie Schoeman and ret RSM Piet Terblanche and Reg explained the origination of the messie. It was then presented to the 4 Smokeshell veterans that were present, that had not yet received, Francois Dercksen, Tony Op't Hof, Hennie Van Der Walt and Gerhard Meintjies.

Martiens van der Merwe said a few words of thanks specifically to Reg Walkerley, Cassie Schoeman. Piet Terblanche and Andrew Whitaker. An extremely successful auction of a knife, custom made and donated by Piet-er Evert, 2 steel ratel plaques, made and donated by Joggie Rautenbach, together with a 40th anniversary Smokeshell golf shirt and 2 Smokeshell coins, was held with auctioneer Ras Joubert, again doing a sterling job. Grace was then said by Francois Dercksen, before a most successful braai was held for the approximately 50 attendees, including 14 Smokeshell veterans. Once again, an excellent turnout and fantastic night of reminiscing, renewing old friendships and enjoying great company.



Gerhard Meintjies receives his geel messie from Colonel Cassie Schoeman and SM Piet Terblanche



Hennie Van Der Walt



Tony Op't Hof



Francois Dercksen



Marttiens Van Der Merwe



Ras Joubert auction



Francois Dercksen



Ras Joubert, Hennie van der Walt and Joggie Rautenbach



Smokeshell veterans, back left to right: Andrew Whitaker (East London), Gordon Jennings (Bloemfontein), Colin Green (Durban), Francois Dercksen (Bloemfontein), Hennie Van Der Walt (Pretoria), Martiens Van Der Merwe (Lydenburg), Lukas Muller (Bultfontein), HP Ferreira (Bloemfontein). Front :Gerhard Meintjies (Clarens), Tony Op't Hof (Pretoria), Mourie van der Bijl (Bloemfontein) Joggie Rautenbach (Bloemfontein), Pieter Evert (Bloemfontein) and Ras Joubert (Koffiefontein)

8 JUNE 2024 REMEMBRANCE PARADE

Saturday 8 June 2024, a short remembrance parade was held at Club Omuthiya in Bloemfontein. It started with the names of the 32bn members that were killed on 4th and 6th of June 1980 being read out, followed by the 13, 61 mech members killed in action on 10 June as well as the 3 SA infantry members.

This was followed by each veteran of the battle, that was present, laying a cross in memory of our brothers and Reg Walkerley laying a wreath in memory of the 32bn members that lost there lives.

This was followed by passing on greetings from fellow veterans that had sent messages and then the last post.

We then retired for tea and coffee together with muffins made by Cristelle Evert.



Tractor Museum 8 June

On Saturday 8 June 2024, 43 Smokeshell veterans and family gathered at the Bloemfontein tractor museum for an afternoon and evening of catching up. It was most enjoyable, with catering provided by Sentraal Primary school. Excellent sirloin steak with potato bake, mushroom and pepper sauce. Once again Lukas Muller, baked loaves and loaves of bread and the dinner was rounded off with a selection of donuts, chocolate eclairs and koeksisters.

Martiens v/d Merwe thanked Jannie Ferreira for once again allowing us to use his wonderful venue and HP Ferreira presented place mats featuring Willem Steenkamp's iconic photo of him being casavaced by the Puma chopper, to all the Smokeshell veterans present.

Then it was again the sad goodbyes as this band of brothers once again had to take their leave. It was a wonderful weekend in a cold Bloemfontein. We will be back as this brotherhood grows stronger every year. Next year will be the 45th anniversary and plans are afoot to get as big a group as possible on the Smokeshell battlefield on the afternoon of Tuesday 10 June 2025. Incidentally 10 June 1980 was also a Tuesday.





SAMVOA

15 June 2024

61 Mech was represented by 61'ner (The Liaison Officer of SAMVOA QLD/NT

Mike O'Connor

The South African Military Veterans Organisation of Australasia (SAMVOA) is an ex-servicemen / women's organisation comprising Military and Police Veterans who were called up or who volunteered to serve their country, South Africa, in the South African Defence Force / South African National Defence Force / South African Police / South African Police Service, or the South African Correctional Services, and who now reside in and outside of South Africa.

There can be no doubt that we proudly served in the best defence force that Africa has ever seen.

This Veteran Organisation dedicates itself, in grateful recognition and memory of their countrymen, the Immortal Dead of South Africa, who, at the call of Duty, made the supreme sacrifice on the battlefields of Africa, Asia and Europe, on land, at sea and in the air.



Mike & Colleen O'Connor

This is an annual event, hosted at a hotel in Brisbane with a guest speaker presenting.

This year we had 72 members in attendance, made up predominately of SADF Veterans as well as our brothers from the Rhodesian Veterans and our *Heritage members* Heritage members are the descendants of Veterans who have passed that either served in the SADF, SAP in the Boerwar or in any of the Allied campaigns.

This year we had a special tribute to Demetri Friend who was so supportive of our organisation and assisted in the sourcing of medals.



Bugle Award

Last Post

In military tradition, the Last Post is the bugle call that signifies the end of the day's activities. It is also sounded at military funerals and at commemorative services to indicate that the soldier has gone to his final rest.

The Last Post is one of a number of bugle calls in military tradition that mark the phases of the day. While Reveille signals the start of a soldier's day, the Last Post signals its end.

The call is believed to have originally been part of a more elaborate routine, known in the British Army as "tattoo", that began in the 17th century. In the evening, a duty officer had to do the rounds of his unit's position, checking that

the sentry posts were manned and rounding up the off-duty soldiers and packing them off to their beds or billets. The officer would be accompanied by one or more musicians. The "first post" was sounded when he started his rounds and, as the party went from post to post, a drum was played. The drumbeats told off-duty soldiers it was time to rest; if the soldiers were in a town, the beats told them it was time to leave the pubs. (The word "tattoo" comes from the Dutch "Doe den tap toe" for "turn off the taps" of beer kegs.)

Another bugle call was sounded when the officer's party completed its rounds, reaching the "last post" – this signalled that the night sentries were alert at their posts and gave one last warning to the other soldiers.

The end of the Boer War saw the rise of war memorials across Britain. This was a break with the past. The traditional British way of commemorating a victory was to erect a statue to the General or the Commander. These new monuments listed the names of the dead of all ranks. Every time a memorial was unveiled, it was to the sound of the Last Post being played, now the symbol not only of death but of remembrance.

The Last Post was eventually incorporated into funeral and memorial services as a final farewell. It symbolises the duty of the dead is over, and they can rest in peace. It has sounded for both friends and foes, a symbol of the democracy of death.



Christopher O'Connor on being awarded the Heritage Members trophy

13 June

Glen Strydom · · ·

Today I traveled up to Castiglione dei Pepoli to visit the 6th South African Armoured Division war graves from WWII. When I arrived, I found this treasure. The men of 61 Mech were here and payed their tribute.



25 Junie

Ariël Hugo (RIV) se seuns het 25 Junie by die Nasionale Museum vir Krygsgeskiedenis in Saxonwald 'n draai gemaak.



History in the making The first 61 Rider tour to Angola. Junie 2024



Johan Booysen a brotherhood.

The 61 Riders tour was my final tour to Angola as a 61 Member. It all started in 2015 on a Motorcycle and I wanted to end it the same way.

Back to basics was the motto, petrol fumes, Angolan dust and a bunch of Veterans sharing the experience of a lifetime.

We had a record time at the Border post of 5 hours but that made these Riders more adamant to go North. Limited facilities bonded the guys like glue as they now had to endure the bare minimum to what they were used to. We had joy we had fun but most of all crying and finding the inner peace within.

At Ondjiva Priester (Tolla) read us a scripture and we sat in a circle so each Rider could give his reason for being there. It lasted for nearly two hours. He got more than he bargained for. Lots of teardrops fell onto Angolan soil again. And this made me realise why we arranged the tour. No money to be made just pure brotherly love for each other.

We lost our Loggies a couple of times but eventually found the rhythm and worked together as

Mark and Gert had a goal, we need to get to Cuvelai for the family of a fallen. We need to help them get closure. The Aim of such a tour is to stretch your support to maximum to ensure that you try reach all goals. Mark and Gert did indeed complete their mission. We once again realized that the Lord was with us on this journey. The night before they left for Cuvelai we met up with the Administrator who came down to Ondjiva for meetings and by chance was at the same venue we stayed at. He opened all the doors for Mark and supported the mission.

My journey through the years, with my daughter, doing tours ended on a high. Our Lord made this possible, He lead us on this path. We made friends, I made brothers, but most of all I helped brothers find closure and just maybe found the piece of the puzzle they needed.

Helping a Veteran has no money value. It comes from the heart within. You cant charge them money to help fight the past, as they have been fighting it from their youth. Do it for the love of brotherhood.



12 Junie



11 Junie Mike Beyl se perd is gepak met kit vir die 61 Riders se Angola Toer.



Werner Botes Marsgereed

61 Riders Ride

*On June the twelfth, we embark on a quest,
An eight thousand-kilometer ride, at our best.
Namibia and Angola, our wheels trace,
The paths we tread as soldiers, time and space.*

*Decades have passed, our youthful bloom now gone,
But in our hearts and minds, youth still lives on.
Old soldiers ride, their spirits never fade,
Their motorcycles roar, their laughter cascade.*

*Through tracts of sand and fields of golden hue,
We trace the footsteps of our past, old and new.
The memories resurface, vivid and bright,
As we journey northward, with nostalgic delight.*

*The roads we traveled then, as young and bold,
Now guide our way, a story yet untold.
The landscapes whisper tales of battles fought,
Echoes of valor, where lives were bought.*

*Nostalgia's embrace, a bittersweet bond,
As we recapture moments, left so long un-fond.
But in this ride, we're more than just nostalgia's thrall,
We're eternal warriors, answering destiny's call.*

*For old soldiers' hearts burn with an eternal flame,
Their spirits soar, unyielding, forever the same.
So let our motorcycles thunder, our spirits unchained,
As we embark on this journey, forever ingrained.*

©Dawid Lotter

Keetmanshoop



Windhoek



Tsumeb 16 Junie



*Alexander Serfontein
Ek het die span gekry van voor af. Mooi
prentjie toe hulle verby ry Tussen Tsumeb en
Otavi.*



Angola



Cahama 18 Junie



VLNR. 1) Gert van der Merwe 2) Gert Martin 3) Jacques Booysen 4) Johan Booysen 5) Mike Beyl 6) Le Brun 7) Tolla Lombaard (bo) 8) Kevin West 9) James (bo) 10) Johan Kruger 11) Werner 12) Mark Farrell (bo 13) Jan 14) Rob Nash

Menongue 21 Junie





Johan Booysen:

Hier sit ek met my Angola 'seun' Joao Mutindi en sy seun Herman. Hy het die kind gebring om ons te kom ontmoet. Sy Suid Afrika oupa's. Ek het 'n geskenkie saamgeneem vir die mannetjie.

Cuito Cuanavale 22 Junie



Lubango en Cuvelai 24 Junie

Mike Beyl en die helfte van die toerlede vertrek wes en slaap oor in Lubango. Die ander helfte vertrek suid vanaf Cuito Cuanavale na Cuvelai.





*Ongiva 26 Junie
Met Angolese filmspan*





28 tot 30 Junie

Die toergroep het nie altyd as 'n eenheid saam beweeg nie. Vanaf 27 Junie het die eerstes na Suid Afrika terug gekeer. Soos Mike Beyl dit stel: "Die toer is eers verby as ek terug is by my huis in die Wes-Kaap."

Albertus Venter het die toergroep se vordering deurgaans gerapporteer, soos wat Mike dit per Satfoon aan hom deurgegee het.

***Albertus Venter
Sitrap 10
28 Junie***

Na 'n Radiostilte van 'n dag het Mike Beyl vanaand gebel.

Hy rapporteer dat hulle doodmoeg en gedaan is. Onthou nou, hulle is ook nou al Ou-toppies. Mike sê 'n mens noem dit 'Fucked Up.'

Gisteraand het hulle op Tsumeb geslaap en die Minen Hotel op horings geneem. Daar is so-waar 'n klein museum waar daar wragtag 'n bottel '61 Mech' wyn uitgestal is. Onthou, dis die plek waar die 61 Stam HK gesuip het in die vroeë tagtigs toe Swapo die boere in die omgewing begin pla het en die boerderygemeenskap probeer ontwrig het.

Vanaand slaap hulle in Windhoek by Urban Kemp en môre-aand op Keetmanshoop en sal

daarvandaan weer probeer rapporteer. Daar lê vir die Manne omtrent nog so 1700 km voor.

As ek Mike is, sal ek maar versigtig by die voordeur instap met sy tuiskoms. Sy vrou het ook seker gesien dat hy nou die dag op die Angolese TV nuus verklaar het dat hy die Angolese dametjies aantreklik vind. Ek hoop nie sy jaag hom terug Angola toe nie.





Albertus Venter
Sitrap 11
29 Junie

Die Donners het sopas in Keetmanshoop arriveer. Van Mariental tot in Keetmanshoop het hulle binne 'n uur en 'n half gery. Die spoed van weerlig . Dit beteken 'n spoed van omtrent 200 kmpu wat effens vinniger as 'n Ratel is. Ek het hulle nout aangespreek daarvoor. Hy rapporteer dat hulle nou op gery is met seer gatte. Van die manne sukkel al om te kak vanweë seer holle.

Mike is ook nie verniet een van die Wimpy se base nie. Dis wat hulle eet vanaand - Wimpy



kos. Dit word sommer by hulle afgelewer. Van die Manne wat al by Cuito suidwaarts gedraai het is al tuis. Maar Mike sê die toer is eers verby, as hy wat die verste suid bly, tuis is.

Nog 'n klagte wat hy het is dat die sleepwaentjie al vol Casavacs is. BMW's.

Hy beweer dat die BMW ryers maar ook effens slapgat is en nie die Punch lekker kan vat nie. Volgens Mike behoort 'n BMW net gebruik te word om Pizzas in 'n voorstad af te lewer. 'n Ding wat op idle moet ry van huis tot huis met 'n kosboks agterop wat ook nie te swaar mag wees nie.

Volgende stop - Springbok.

Albertus Venter
Sitrap 12
30 Junie

‘Die pad wil net nie ophou nie!’ sê Mike.

Die meeste Manne is vanaand by die huis. Hulle druk deur Kaapstad toe. Mike moet dan nog vir 200 km aanpik na sy huis.

Mike beweer dat hulle lywe Moertoe is maar dat hulle geestelik nog Topfiks is. Dis 'n goeie eienskap van 'n Topsoldaat.

Mark Farrell *A Personal Account*

This is my personal version, of experience on our 61 Riders June Angola Motorcycle trip. This was not a trip that just happened, it took months and months of planning by Johan Booyesen / Kevin West, and Jan Voster. There were lots of work done by tour members, and Family. And nothing would have been able, without all their input and time and money spend.



Grunau

Going through Ovambo Land, starting in Tsumeb was a big surprise. Nothing looks like it did, when i did National Service. I was looking for land marks etc. , but all I saw that I remember is names Oshivelo / Ondangwa / Omuthiya / Ongiva .. etc. with all signs of bases missing. Traffic was manageable, but still all the kraals and donkeys / goats / cattle on or next to the road. Going into Angola is an Administrative nightmare, with us sitting at the border to cross for 5.5 hours. (We send copies off everything weeks / months before, to ensure easy crossing). Corruption and hardly any control, at border crossing is pathetic.



We had a professional Angolan government official assisting us on the trip , but even he could not influence certain processes. Eventually going over into Angola, was a culture shock. All these Angolans discovered Chinese bikes, and they were whizzing all over the place uncontrolled without any policing and traffic laws. Runners were all over the place, trying to exchange SA Rands into Angolan Kwanza - rate was 50+ Kwanza, to the Rand.

The garage just across the border, that we wanted to fuel up had a endless queue - but luckily were able , to fill our tanks cheaply for the first time. By the time we got going, it was dark and we passed our overnight camping spot in Ondjiva. When we stopped along the side of the road, we were crowded by all people that treated us like rock stars and plenty of photos were taken until police made way for us to make a u - turn back to our accommodation.

Roads in Angola is full of pot marks, and some big holes - The bikers had a sort of dance on their bikes, to indicate pot holes with their legs. I personally thought that I was going to die when I went into Angola the first time in 1983 - Askari. "Vir Volk , en Vaderland " I was only 18 , but thought it was the " right thing " to



Prayer gathering conducted by Tolla

do. Going over the second time, the boogieman was off my back as my bike and myself was blessed by my wife before leaving.

There was four emotional movements for me on this trip;

The first was after our First night - Tolla had a "bid - Parade" with a difference, with us all given an opportunity to say what the tour meant for each one and what we expected. Each and Every member deserves Respect, and Honour - And it was not long, that we relieved some tension with the emotions that bubbled over.

The second one was when I experienced the raw emotions at Cuito Cuanavale, when all took communion on the Bridge by breaking bread and taking some wine. Some handled the moment differently, and I walked away so they didn't spot my weakness. I had a look at the terrain that the attack took place, and could not believe my eyes. (My opinion is that it look like the killing fields in some Hollywood films).

The third time was going back, to Cuvelai. The white sand, and bushes looked and smelled the same. Lt Liebenberg being shot on that hectic first attack (31 December 1983), and the rumours afterwards who shot him. Could remember riding past shot out Ratels, on the second attack (4 January 1984) when you knew not many made it out. Stepping out of a Ratel the first time, and the first thing one saw was a T54 Tank moving in the bushes ahead of us, and remember shouting to Sampie (Platoon Sergeant) - And he told me to run to a Ratel



90, that pulled along side us. Unbelievably I knew the gunner (Vincent), and pointed out the tank – which he took out with three 90mm Heat rounds.

Our job being back in Cuvelai (Myself and Gert Van Der Merwe) was to collect anything for a grieving 80 year old parent that received no remains of their son. We dug in trenches, and tank positions etc. - But there was not much left, but Gert had a GPS positioning device and could more or less determine where their son died. We did it quietly, accompanied by government officials. One young interpreter asked me, "Why don't we just forget everything?" If they only knew....My old section was in my head the entire time, as we weren't meant to be alive after that battle on 4 January 1984. A total of 24 brave men died in Askari, and I will never forget them or our commander David Lotter that saved our lives

The forth time that was emotional for me was to accompany Tolla Lombaard trying to find a graveyard. We found the old Portuguese church with graveyard and gravestones of old Portuguese soldiers (had inscriptions of death, in 1973) Gravestones were broken and placed in the church and defecated on. I removed the gravestone of a forgotten soldier that needed respect too. Our mission was to report to the old Portuguese Father, and husband about his wife and daughters graves condition. (They died in a Landmine explosion). That was the worst emotional feeling I had on this trip, as I feel the beautiful small church and graveyard in a town still had a meaning and purpose.

Riding motorcycles, and doing it with men that had same exposures as yourself can not be penned down. Love and Respect, and Comradely flows easily. Lifelong Friendships were made, and the 61 Riders being part of 61 Mechanised Battalion should never be underestimated.



With the Governor of Cuvelai



Meeting government officials



Making new friends



Embracing the Distant Past

Through time's ethereal veil, our wheels unfurled,
Returning from annals of a distant world.
Old warriors we, unyielding in our might,
Refusing to dissolve into the cosmic night.

The roar of engines echoes in our ears,
A symphony of resilience that dispels fears.
Battered and scarred, our souls remain aflame,
Igniting a beacon in this modern frame.

We've witnessed battles, triumphs, and despair,
But our unwavering spirit time cannot impair.
Though wounds may linger, our resolve still stands,
A fortress unyielding, guarding our plans.

We are not ready yet to fade away,
Our dreams still dance, our hearts still find a way.
On motorbikes we ride, a testament to might,
Embracing the future, leaving behind the night.

We've shed our armor, now adorned with grace,
Wisdom's tapestry upon our weary face.
Old soldiers we, but warriors forevermore,
Our spirit eternal, unwavering to our core.

So let the winds of change caress our brow,
We'll navigate its currents, there's no room for how.
We return, not as relics of the past,
But as living legends, destined to outlast.

Our wheels will turn, our engines roar on,
Through streets and memories, our tale will live on.
Old soldiers never die, their echoes resound,
In every beat of our hearts, our strength is found.

©Dawid Lotter

We completed the first 61 Riders tour to Angola - on our motorbikes. In excess of 6500 km. A great tour with great guys. Thanks to the back up vehicles as well (Lebrun Rossouw, Rob Nash and James Glendenning). Thanks also to Johan Booysen for the arrangements and reception in various towns. All in all, a great tour. Thanks to all the 61 Riders who participated. A special word of thanks to Rob Nash for making the shield which we handed over at the Cuito Museum.





VERJAARDAG WENSE / BIRTHDAY WISHES



Verjaarsdae vir die maand van Julie volgens die informasie beskikbaar op die 61 Meg se databasis.

Help asseblief om dit opgedateer te hou.

Die Veertigers

Leon Marais 1949-07-03

Die Vyftigers

Lorraine Martin	1953-07-22
Jan Malan	1956-07-12
Anthony Op't Hof	1959-07-02
Job Little Tait	1959-07-09
Andre Sonnekus	1959-07-16
Hermanus Potgieter	1959-07-17
Brian James	1959-07-29
Martin Gouws	1959-07-31

Die Sestigters

Johnny Nel	1960-07-02
John Druez	1961-07-18
Etienne Pretorius	1961-07-18
Anton du Toit	1961-07-21
Frik Viljoen	1961-07-24
Johannes Buys	1962-07-05
Dawid Momberg	1962-07-23
Andre Pepler	1963-07-02
Manie van Eeden	1963-07-08
Joe van den Bergh	1963-07-17
Dennis Waspe	1963-07-19
Warren Millward	1963-07-26
Christopher Sparks	1964-07-06
Colin Eriksen	1964-07-16
Johan de Wet	1964-07-17

Norman Barnard	1964-07-19
Louis Luther	1964-07-21
Terence Gersbank	1964-07-24
Hannes Roodt	1965-07-01
Stelios Moraitis	1965-07-10
Len Robberts	1965-07-21
Riaan Gray	1966-07-31
Leonard Jacobs	1967-07-07
James Glendenning	1967-07-19
Shawn Koen	1967-07-23
Marc De Villiers	1967-07-26
Terblanche Izak	1967-07-26
Herman Schoombee	1968-07-03
Mark Wayne Van Niekerk	1968-07-10
Stan Edwards	1968-07-15
Jan Jordaan	1968-07-26
Craig Ashley Benn	1969-07-03
Willie Cloete	1969-07-25

Die Sewentigers

Wilhelm Rosenstrauch	1970-07-03
Jan Lodewikus (Lodi) van Rensburg	1970-07-27
Retha Venter	1972-07-04
Charles Gantz	1972-07-25
Shawn Bezuidenhout	1973-07-15



MEMBERSHIP OF THE 61 MECH VETERANS ASSOCIATION

You can join the 61 Mech Veterans Association as a 61 Mech Veteran (full membership) if you are a bona fide military veteran who served with Combat Group Juliet or 61 Mechanised Battalion Group or took part in operations or exercises with 61 Mech, regardless of gender, race or creed over the period 1978 to 31 December 2005. A full member has the right to vote for the election of office bearers at national and lower echelon levels. He/she has the right to attend all parades and functions of the association.

You can join the 61 Mech Veterans Association as a 61 Mech Supporter if you did not serve with Combat Group Juliet or 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, regardless of your state or country, as long as you subscribe to the aims and objectives of the association. This is also where friends, family and relatives of 61 Mech Supporters can join the association without having to be bona fide military veterans. Supporters of the association are entitled to attend all association parades, functions, and annual general meetings but do not have any rights to vote. They also get access to the 61 Mech member website to view the stories, photos and declassified military documents and may receive association correspondence.

If you want to join the 61 Mech Veterans Association for the first time click on this link, complete your details and make payment of your membership fees - <https://www.61mech.org.za/pages/subscribe>

Subscribe

	61 Mech Supporter	61 Mech Veteran
Subscription Fee (per annum)	R300.00	R300.00
	Subscribe	Subscribe
Subscription Fee (10 year membership)	R2,000.00	R2,000.00
	Subscribe	Subscribe

IN MEMORIUM

Jan Breytenbach

The founding father of the 1 Reconnaissance Commando (Recces) and commander of 32 Battalion, Col Jan Breytenbach (91), passed away peacefully in the company of his family at the Mediclinic George on Father's Day today, 16 June, at 12:30.

A retired South African Special Forces officer, he was best known as being the first commander of 1 Recces, the first special-force unit in South Africa, as well as the first commander of 32 Battalion and 44 Parachute Brigade.

Breytenbach formed 1 Recce on 1 October 1972 in Oudshoorn. A few years later the unit relocated to Durban.

He is revered by all as one of the greatest soldiers of our time.

George Herald

Col Jan Breytenbach with 61 Mech during Ops Protea

On 25 August Combat Group (10 – 61 Mech) under command of Cmdt Roland de Vries at Xangongo, was allocated to protect Task Force Alpha from a FAPLA counterattack from Cahama towards Xangongo. The pathfinder group of Col Breytenbach which had been operating around Peu-Peu was put under command of Combat Group 61 Mech. Not any of the other combat groups seemed to want him due to his seniority.

When Col Joubert informed de Vries of this arrangement, he replied: "Yes, Colonel, thank you." He and Breytenbach were old acquaintances; in the 1970s Breytenbach had been his instructor on two gruelling courses and they had often jumped together at Bloemfontein and Oudtshoorn.

Like every other Permanent Force officer de Vries was well aware of Breytenbach's notorious penchant for marching to his own drumbeat and then somehow getting away with it. But he also had immense professional respect for the SADF's most decorated combat soldier, and he knew exactly where the vastly battle-experienced Breytenbach and his men could be slotted in – Weyers's Combat Team 3, which would have its hands full if FAPLA came down the road from Cahama in force.

"Added firepower and some inherent aggression and solid operational experience were always bargains in Angola. Breytenbach and his mercenaries had what it took," De Vries recalls.

“The Pathfinders had been wandering around doing some interesting fighting work ... The band of warriors was now searching for some more interesting killing work to be done elsewhere. Where they went, shooting was apt to follow.” It was a decision which would de Vries grinding his teeth at one stage.

Breytenbach recalled “the locals ventured out of their homes in town to see who the new occupants of Xangongo were ... They were soon introduced to the victual stores of the departed FAPLAs, which made them very happy indeed as they staggered away under bags of maize flour and containers filled with tinned food. Christmas had come early for them, albeit with an almighty bang.”

Near midday De Vries returned to his battle group, which was now ready and standing by – Weyers and his new followers from 44 Parachute Brigade to head up the Cahama road. De Vries was particularly eager to see Weyers on his way so that his western flank could be secured as soon as possible, but first Combat Team 3 had to be married up with the Breytenbach’s pathfinders. Technically the allocation of the pathfinders presented a hierarchical problem, since Breytenbach out-ranked Weyers by a substantial margin (and De Vries, too, for that matter). This did not bother Breytenbach, who cared little for the normal military niceties except when it suited him. Weyers had no objections either, since the new additions had obvious advantages for him.

If anything substantial came down the road from Cahama, Weyers was going to need all the resources he could get, and the pathfinders with their machine-guns and some 106mm recoilless guns they had also acquired were formidably eager and seasoned fighters; combined with Weyers’s Ratels, Elands and 140mm artillery pieces they formed, as De Vries notes, a “deadly alliance ...

De Vries recalled: “Our troops fondly referred to these seasoned yet strangely attired soldiers of Jan Breytenbach as ‘tandeborsels’ (tooth-

brushes) because of their weird foreign accents and outlandish habit of speaking. They spoke on the inside of their mouths and not towards the outside, as normal people tend to do. Nevertheless, they were fierce fighters, not to be encountered on a dark and eerie road (such) as the one which led to Cahama. Major Joe Weyers duly reported ‘March and Combat ready’. On my command Combat Team 3 was released westward towards Cahama.”

By mid-afternoon Combat Team 3 had reached Big Boy 1, and in consultation with Breytenbach and Gildenhuys, Weyers deployed astride the road along the crests of some low hills, 17 or 18km from Cahama, from where he had a long-range view westwards and also occupied dominating terrain.

One gathers that although there was an adequate working relationship between Weyers and Breytenbach, the command atmosphere at Chicusse was slightly strained. Earlier that afternoon there had been a slight disagreement about a tall radio mast, located about a kilometre from the road near Chicusse, which Breytenbach proposed to demolish. His request to do so was promptly turned down, because there had been an express order from Task Force HQ that infrastructure of this type was to be left untouched for the duration of Operation Protea because it might be of value at some stage, in this case for the interception of enemy communications.

Breytenbach acquiesced, but soon afterwards the rending of steel was heard and the mast collapsed; he had demolished it, De Vries comments, “in a sort of devil-may-care manner, regardless of the standing orders and potential compromise of this small force deployed at the doorstep of an enemy brigade.”

Breytenbach’s version differs somewhat:

“Some months previously Special Forces had attempted to destroy the mast, which was reputed to be the highest structure in Angola at the time and which pushed out streams of pro-

paganda into northern SWA. The Recce attempt failed since they ran into a very strong defence system specially deployed to protect the mast. They had also taken some casualties.”

“I therefore decided to destroy the mast on the way back, especially since any former defence element seemed to have been withdrawn to Cahama, probably as a result of the unexpected capture of Xangongo ... Besides, I owed it to my old unit to complete the job. So I informed De Vries of my intention. Back came the reply: “Negative. I say again, Negative. You are NOT, repeat NOT, to destroy any infrastructure and are to return to this location immediately. Do you copy?”

“I answered briefly: “Roger” ... But I had no intention passing up such a brilliant opportunity to stop propaganda saturating the air waves into SWA. The broadcast station was probably in Lubango but with this mast still left intact to bounce propaganda into northern SWA, much of what we had achieved with Operation Protea would be turned into a handful of ashes, undermining the garlands of flowers our victory over FAPLA should have been crowned with.”

“It would remain in business to pump out propaganda to the masses at a time when the power of the MPLA government was being severely undermined and even while their FAPLA forces were in the process of being decimated by the Boers. Dropping the mast would probably put the MPLA broadcasts into this contested region out of action for good anyway.”

Having satisfied himself, if no-one else, about the necessity of demolishing the mast, Breytenbach ignored orders and headed for it:

“I examined the mast with some of my expert advisors. The mast was probably about 300 feet high, built of steel girders and anchored to concrete slabs sunk into the ground via very stout steel cables. My gunner, David Barr, had a go trying to sever the cables with his. 50 Browning, but the bullets just sheered off the taut steel wire without doing any damage. But then

somebody, I think it was Denis Croukamp (many years later Croukamp confirmed that it had indeed been him – author), produced a hefty shifting spanner. “Let’s undo the U-bolts with this,” he said.”

“The cables kept the whole structure upright, being connected to strops imbedded in concrete blocks acting as anchors on the four corners of the mast. So loosening just one U-bolt caused the mast to start swaying, at first, and then, dramatically, to topple away from the loosened cable because of the tension in the remaining three. It was so easy that it amounted to an anti-climax.”

“After swaying away from us it began to fold in on itself like spaghetti to collapse slowly into a crumpled heap, to our astonishment, it should be said, almost at our feet. We did not expect it to be so easy to drop the highest structure in Angola without any fanfare or drama to accompany the event. Anyway, the mess of twisted steel could never again be used to re-erect the mast to its former imposing glory.”

“Loosening just one bolt with a shifting spanner? Demolishing imposing structures was getting to be an almost mundane, unglamorous enterprise, and certainly did nothing to build our reputations as demolition experts.”

De Vries was not a happy man when I gleefully informed him of what we, that is I, had done, but he decided not to push the issue, not with me anyway although he probably reported my “misdemeanour” further up the chain of command.

Today De Vries is philosophical about this blatant disregard for orders: “It was disappointing ... I had expected the operationally seasoned to mentor and support the operationally less seasoned ... (but) in the end the damage to the enemy’s tower was immaterial. However, the damage to the status of command and personal relationships on the battlefield could have been far more serious.”

IN MEMORIUM

Johan Barnard (Barries) 26 June



By: Andrew Whitaker

Barries, Johan, Oom Barries, Major Barries, somewhat of a legend in the 61 veterans association in Bloemfontein. The face behind Club Omuthiya.

I met Barries in somewhat unfortunate personal circumstances. Just outside Bloemfontein on our way for the 2017 Smokeshell reunion weekend, we had been involved in a motor vehicle accident. With our vehicle on the back of a tow truck, we were dropped at the City Lodge and eventually found a taxi to drop us at Club Omuthiya. Later that night, on hearing of our predicament, Barries gave us a lift back to our hotel and so a friendship spanning the last 7 years was born.

Barries had joined permanent force and rose to the rank of Sergeant Major at 1SSB, before converting to an officer and completing his service



as a major after 19 year's service. But probably his greatest achievement was outside of the military, where as an accomplished boxing referee, he was selected to referee at the Beijing Olympic Games. What an achievement.

When it came to Club Omuthiya, he was the man behind the scenes, who always made sure that the Club house was clean before the monthly skouerskuur, took great delight in welcoming all present, especially those that had travelled a distance and made sure that all member's birthdays in a particular month were announced.

He was also the photographer, spending most of the evening taking photographs for publication on the Club's Facebook page. Nothing regarding 61 veterans was too much trouble for Barries.

Barries was happily married to Zenobia, who did not as a rule attend the monthly get togeth-

ers, but we met in a rain drenched, 2022 Gariep weekend for the first time.

In his business life, after retiring from the military, Barries started a business manufacturing clothing. COVID brought some tough times from a business perspective but in recent discussions with him it seemed that things were back on track.

We really missed Barries at both the May skouerskuur and the Gariep weekend as he was battling with health problems, but who could have realized the severity of his situation. It came as a huge shock to all that knew him, when on 2 June we were advised that he had been placed on life support.

10 days earlier on enquiring about his health received the following response from him. (Morning Andrew, I am getting there. The sores are almost gone. Only the marks and the extreme itchiness is still there. Otherwise I am good!! Kind Regards Barries). Sadly it was to be our last communication.

Then last Monday we received the terrible and tragic news that he was to be taken off life support and he sadly passed away on Wednesday, 26 June.

He will be sadly missed. Condolences to Zenobia and all his family.

RIP Barries, until we meet again.



DIE BESONDERE VERKYKER

Deur: Dawid Lotter

Hierdie verkyker is nie sommer enige verkyker nie. Op 4 Januarie 1984 tydens Operasie Askari. neem my Kompanie (A Komp) die geveg oor vanaf D Kompanie met die laaste en finale aanval op Cuvelai. Aan ons linkerkant staan Ratel 20 Roepsein 13B in rook gehul (uitgeskiet deur 'n Russiese tank), 'n ent verder staan 'n T54/55. Een blik is duidelik dat die tenk bemanning dood is. So 10 tree verder lê 'n gesneuwelde Fapla soldaat. Langs sy kop lê hierdie verkyker. Ek gee my drywer Manson Kullin opdrag om te stop, en strydig met reëls spring ek uit en herwin die bloederige item van die gesneuwelde se half weggeskiete kop af.

My voorste elemente het reeds weer kontak gemaak met die vyand se volgende lyn van verdediging. Die geveg gaan voort en laatmiddag ry my Kompanie (A Komp) die dorp Cuvelai binne.

Soos Inligting nou maar maak, lê hulle beslag op alles wat waardevol is (Inligtings ontleding?). Daaroor het ek my eie siening. Maar ek het vas besluit niemand gaan my verkyker van my wegneem nie. Vir die volgende paar dae is hy diep weggesteek in my slaapsak, want die moontlikheid was daar dat my Ratel bemanning dalk uit hulle beurt sou praat. Ek maak baie planne om die Inligting en Militêre Polisie te oorkom, want ek weet dat hulle al die voertuie op die pad terug na Ondjiva met 'n fyn kam sou deurgaan. Die verkyker is te groot om iewers onopsigtelik te versteek. Toe soos 'n engel kom die redding. Ek en Annete het saam gegradeer by die Militêre Akademie in 1980. En sy het intussen Genl George Meiring se PA geword, of het op sy staf gedien. En soos die geluk dit wou hê land die Genl met 'n klomp koerantmanne suid van Mupa. Die konvooi stop, omtrent 10 km vanaf die eerste MP deursoekingspunt.

Baie vinnig draai ek die verkyker in my nu-

tria serp toe, en na 'n kort gesprek glip Annete die item in die Genl se begasie in. Slim meisie, die Annete want geen MP sou dit waag om die Genl te deursoek nie. En so gaan die onttrekking voort met my verkyker veilig aan boord van 'n Puma helikopter. So twee maande later arriveer 'n geregistreerde pakkie in Klerksdorp. MY VERKYKER. Ek het nooit die geleentheid gehad om met Annete daaroor te gesels nie. Ek wonder nog al die jare hoe Annete dit reggekry het. Ek glo dit is 'n besondere verkyker. Na 35 jaar het ek nog nerens so iets gesien nie. Hy het 'n kragpunt wat die afgemete kruisdrade op die lense verlig (soos 'n duikboot se periskoop), en 'n infrarooi poort. Dan geel filters vir ??.

Die vraag wat ek al die jare gehad het – Was dit die Tank Leier se verkyker, Indien wel, was dit die verkyker waarmee hy 13B gesien het voor die fatale skoot??

Ek het die verkyker geskenk aan 61 MVV vir uitstalling in die Ditsong Museum.



A Reflection on Change

The Structure and Function of Veteran Associations

Dr Anthony Turton

A remarkable aspect of our generation of South Africans relates to the rate of change we have encountered. That change has been massive, but often forgotten by those who lived through it. The editor of the 61 MVA Newsletter asked me to reflect on this aspect as it applies to a veteran's association.

All the readers have served in the military. All have been shaped by that service in some way or other. However, not all served in the same unit, even if they have a shared experience in one.

In reality, there was never one single story about military life, but rather a tapestry of multiple stories, collectively individualized, but each with a highly nuanced difference. The word tapestry best describes it, because such intricate textures and patterns are merely a reflection of the interplay between the warp and the weft threads. The warp threads are representative of the experience of the individual from the start of their journey into the military, until their final exit from the military into an uncertain future. That future is where the veteran's association fits in, so we will return to that later. The weft threads represent the different units that prepared each soldier for their ultimate role in a composite unit like 61 Mech Bn Gp.



How the warp threads interact with the weft threads gives the overall fabric its texture, colour and pattern during their operational deployment. The question then arises about the role and function of any veteran's association, after their deployment ends, for that determines the structure and leadership type.

From my personal perspective, the role of the veteran's association is primarily to dignify the act of service through recognition. These three words say it all - dignity through recognition - for that is probably the greatest need for any conscripted soldier. You see, all needs are not equal, even as all needs are legitimate and important. A conscripted soldier often has the need for closure, for they seldom chose willingly to fight. They were trained by a cohort of highly skilled leaders to perform tasks that they would otherwise not naturally execute. Few were adequately debriefed after their release back into society, and some carry emotional and physical scars that deserve treatment. This is somewhat different to the professional soldier, who makes a career out of fighting, and commits resources to constantly upgrade their skills needed to remain effective.

So, if we take as our point of departure, the core mission of any veteran's association as being the provision of "dignity through recognition", then we immediately see a difference between the need of a conscripted soldier and that of a professional. From my perspective, this is what makes 61MVA such a unique entity, for it represents the interests of multiple corps - infan-

try, armour, artillery, engineers, services, personnel and technical services - the overwhelming majority of which were conscripts, but all of which were part of a potent combat machine at some time in their lives.

This means that 61MVA will always be challenged by the one persistent issue of its own identity. Is 61MVA going to be an exclusive association of those who served time in a structured operational deployment and earned a yellow combat dagger? Or is 61MVA going to be an inclusive association, recognizing the fact that every member of the unit served elsewhere before, and even after their time at Omuthiya, Rooikop or Lohatla?

To answer this question, let us dwell briefly on the evolution of 61 Mech. The genesis was during the fluidity of Operation Savanna and the subsequent formation of Combat Group Juliet in 1978 consisting of elements of other units. Those were uncertain times, without clear direction, placing great demands on the leadership team, because ingenuity happened on the very cusp of chaos. Problems were solved on the fly, without the benefit of a clearly defined doctrine, but driven by the needs on the battlefield. Those members were loosely configured, and the yellow combat dagger had not yet been conceptualized, so logically this simple fact must play a role in the future evolution of 61MVA.

Then came the Omuthiya years, as 61 Mech Bn Gp was formalized in 1979. This saw the emergence of battle-hardened leadership capable of drafting a coherent doctrine of mecha-



nized warfare as it applied to the African context. Visionary leadership adapted lessons from history, most notably about the experiences of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, General Bernard Montgomery and General George Patton among others, as they rewrote the rule books about fast-moving mobile warfare in the 20th Century. The doctrine that emerged was unique to the needs of the SADF at that time. But, more importantly, the skills of the leadership were deepened and broadened sufficiently to create the DNA for rapid adaptation as the operational demands changed.

From my perspective, probably the single greatest achievement at this time was the evolution of the cookie cutter model that enabled the rapid creation of new battlegroups as needed. We saw this in the success of 62 Mech and 63 Mech, both short-lived but useful clones of the potent original. More importantly, we also saw the transition from the fluid requirements of a counter-insurgency war, to the set piece engagement of a conventional war in 1988. In this regard the achievements were astonishing indeed. How rapid was the transformation when the anti-tank Ratel 90's perfected in 61 Mech, were simply upgraded with ZT3 rockets, and transferred to their new role as potent tank killers in 32 Bn?

Once again, rapid change was required when the UN mandated 61 Mech to combine with Koevoet to neutralize the threats posed by the large PLAN incursion in April 1989. During this so-called Nine Days War, officially known as Operation Merlyn, the well-honed and unique 61 Mech doctrine had to be changed almost in an instant, as new operational circumstances dictated. Commanders, gunners and drivers had to learn fast about the more appropriate, but confusing, Koevoet tactics. Yet again 61 Mech was up to the task.

During the implementation of UN Resolution 435 granting Namibia its independence, 61 Mech was relocated to Rooikop. Yet again the change was massive as two companies from 32 Bn were merged into 61 Mech, each battalion



having their own distinctive culture and ethos. This also saw the end of conscription, as the spring from which new members were sourced simply dried up. As before, leadership skills were tested to the extreme as different challenges were confronted, and new realities accepted. The operational circumstances changed, with the need for a rapid deployment internal security force during the CODESA years underpinning the transition to democracy in 1994. Deployment in the townships differed fundamentally from service in Angola.

This is a rich history indeed, but on closer scrutiny, it becomes obvious that for limited times only, stable leadership based on a clearly defined doctrine was possible. The one constant was change, and in adapting to the demands of that process, the leadership generally excelled. When viewing history in this way, it also becomes clear that while various cohorts of NSM had a perception of a stable culture and ethos within 61 Mech, the PF leadership did not share that same perception.

On the contrary, each cohort of NSM had vastly different experiences, even if they agree within their own cohort that a single ethos was present while they served. This is the challenge that arises from some grass roots members for an exclusive VA, simply because there is no sin-

gle feature that defines any logic of exclusivity. Juliet was vastly different from the Omuthiya, Rooikop and Lohatla eras. Those who remember Omuthiya, also have vastly different perceptions of operational deployment during the earlier unconventional, and subsequent conventional phases of the Bush War. So, what does this mean for 61MVA going forward?

It is not for me to prescribe in any way how the affairs of 61MVA should be run, for that is an internal leadership challenge. However, a few observations might give some potentially valuable insight.

The first observation is that 61 Mech has always been fit for purpose, so why would 61MVA be any different? Just as each new challenge has been rapidly met by a highly competent leadership team in the past, why would we not expect the same for the future? Therefore, I have confidence that 61MVA will continue to flourish long into the future, adapting to new demands arising from an aging post-combat membership.

The second observation is that 61MVA is the custodian of an incredibly rich, and somewhat unique operational doctrine, culture and ethos. Few combat units in any of the military arms of UN member states have a similar track record. In this aspect alone, each individual member of 61MVA can hold their head high, and beam with enormous pride, for they were a small part of a bigger whole that has earned the right to be recognized wherever veterans are respected. This is certainly the case in SAMVOA, where 61MVA is a distinct part of the rich history of South African military culture and achievements. Those members all served in what I call the Era of Excellence.

The final observation is that the internal demands by some members, for the exclusivity of membership criteria, is in fact a poison pill that flies in the face of the single most remarkable element of success – the capacity to integrate all arms at the lowest level of functional command, in the shortest time. It is this

single aspect that makes 61MVA unique in the world, for no other military that I am aware of, has ever achieved such a high level of integration of all arms, at the lowest level of command. This core ethos defined the capacity to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, so inclusivity has always been a critical success factor, and will endure long into the future.

But above all, we should never lose sight of the fact that the core mission of a veteran's association dealing mostly with conscripted soldiers is "dignity through recognition". These three words have profound implications when embracing the textured tapestry of perceptions of various cohorts who shared experiences from different vantage points at different times. Healing comes from closure that dignity enables.

Without recognition, dignity will remain elusive, and consequently healing will be impossible.

Mobilitate vincere.



Join us for for a



MEMORIAL PARADE

.....
in honor of Our Fallen Soldiers
and
Veterans of 61 Mech Batallion
.....

SATURDAY 17 AUGUST 2024 09H00 – 13H00

Soetendal, Wellington, Western Cape



CONTACT

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